K. McRoberts, “Disagreeing on the Fundamentals: English Canada and Quebec,” in McRoberts and P. Monahan, eds, *The Charlottetown Accord, The Referendum and the Future of Canada* (Toronto, 1993)

**Overview**

Failure of Charlottetown Accord – like the Meech Lake Accord before it – can best be understood in terms of the profoundly different conceptions of political community that predominate in English Canada and Quebec. Certainly institutional factors played a role, but it was the divergence between English Cdns and Quebecois over the most basic of constitutional questions, the definition and nature of political community, that explains how and why the exercise failed so spectacularly.

**Background**

* Quebec’s constitutional vision been defined for close to 30 years – underlying principle is one of asserting the specificity of Quebec, the basic project one of expanding the powers of Quebec govt
* Meanwhile, over past 2 decades, English Canada has become firmly attached to its own constitutional vision – central to this vision is the ideal of Canada as the pre-eminent political community, and concern for protecting and strengthening role of federal govt as ‘national’ govt to all Canadians
* Ultimately, through the constitutional debate leading up to Charlottetown, English Canada and Quebec pursued fundamentally different agendas
* July 7 Accord gave concrete form to English-Canada’s constitutional vision – had no major attenuation of federal powers, and clearest instances of provincial power were all areas of pre-existing exclusive provincial jurisdiction
  + Accord also contained proposal for Senate reform that met the Triple E criteria
  + Contained a ‘distinct society’ interpretative clause – but the clause would not affect the division of powers
  + Quebec was not formally party to the negotiations
* Once Quebec was included, Quebec’s project was not seriously incorporated, though changes were made.
* Charlottetown Accord appears to have adopted both English Canada and Quebec’s constitutional projects, but then qualifies them both very substantially in an effort to make them palatable to the other side
* Ultimately, rather than mutual accommodation of the two projects, Charlottetown was a mutual frustration of them – leaving neither Quebec nor English Canada with much reason to support the project

**Conclusion**

* Competing conceptions of political community is what underlies the failure of the Charlottetown Accord
* English Canada sought to make Quebec akin to every other province in status and power – very much a liberal, individualist rights mentality
* McRoberts notes that the process has clearly become more complex and it is difficult to see how a new set of constitutional negotiations might be lost
* Challenge next time will be to address constitutional questions more directly and assess proposals on their merits rather than in terms of issues that by definition cannot be solved, such as competing notions of political community